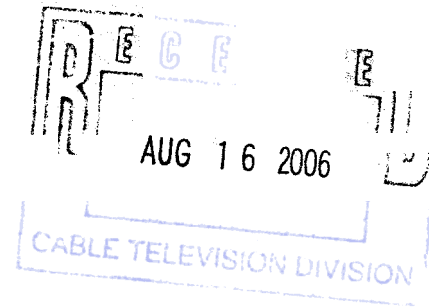


Testimony of Robert J. Halpin, President& CEO,  
Merrimack Valley Economic Development Council, before the  
Massachusetts Department of Telecommunications and Energy

**RE: CTV 06-01**

August 16, 2006



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Good Morning. My name is Robert J. Halpin. I am testifying  
before you today as President and CEO of the Merrimack Valley  
Economic Development Council. The council's offices are located at  
439 South Union St., Lawrence, MA.

Our organization promotes the economic interests of the entire  
Merrimack Valley region of Massachusetts, a region of 24 diverse  
communities stretching from Greater Lowell to Greater Newburyport  
Our Council encourages greater communication and cooperation  
between the public and private sectors. We foster collaborative  
efforts between and among communities. Our mission is to create

sustainable economic growth and prosperity for every community in the Merrimack Valley.

We believe that competition in the marketplace is a good thing for both business and residential consumers. Competition gives consumers choices, and helps to stabilize and sometimes to lower the cost of goods and services.

In the area of cable Television service, a lack of competition has meant that Massachusetts consumers have had their choices limited to their community's franchised cable company or satellite dish service. The cost of cable television service has risen rapidly in the past few years, with little recourse for cable TV consumers.

The Commonwealth's current cable franchising regulations were developed more than 20 years ago. It is time to re-visit these regulations, and Verizon's proposal to the DTE offers a good place to start. The proposal before us deals only with the timeline associated with the franchising process. It does not in any way alter the right of a community to collect cable TV franchise fees; to fund or broadcast local access channels and community programming; or in any way impair a community's ability to manage rights-of-way.

Verizon's video, voice and Internet services are being offered over the most advanced fiber-optic network in the country. This investment is as good for the state's economy as it is for consumers. These networks provide enough capacity not just for TV services, but also for future distance learning and enhanced medical applications. In addition, high capacity networks have significant impact on our members' ability to leverage the power of technology to compete globally.

In the past I had the pleasure of serving as Town Manager for the Town of North Andover at a time when the issuing authority was considering a so-called 'Open Access' provision in the transfer of the Town's cable license to ATT. I am reminded of the arguments in opposition to Open Access: Open Access to the cable system would discourage technological innovation and over the long run have the effect of limiting consumer choice to other competitive approaches. If you ask consumers, they will in fact tell you that they want cable choice in the same manner as internet choice, and this proposal helps to bring real cable choice and competition to Massachusetts. With genuine competition, consumers win.

Verizon's continued investment in Massachusetts helps to further the mission of the Merrimack Valley Economic Council. We support CTV -06-01 and encourage you to act favorably upon this petition.

Thank you.

Robert J. Halpin, President & CEO

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